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July 1986

Gabon

Post Report

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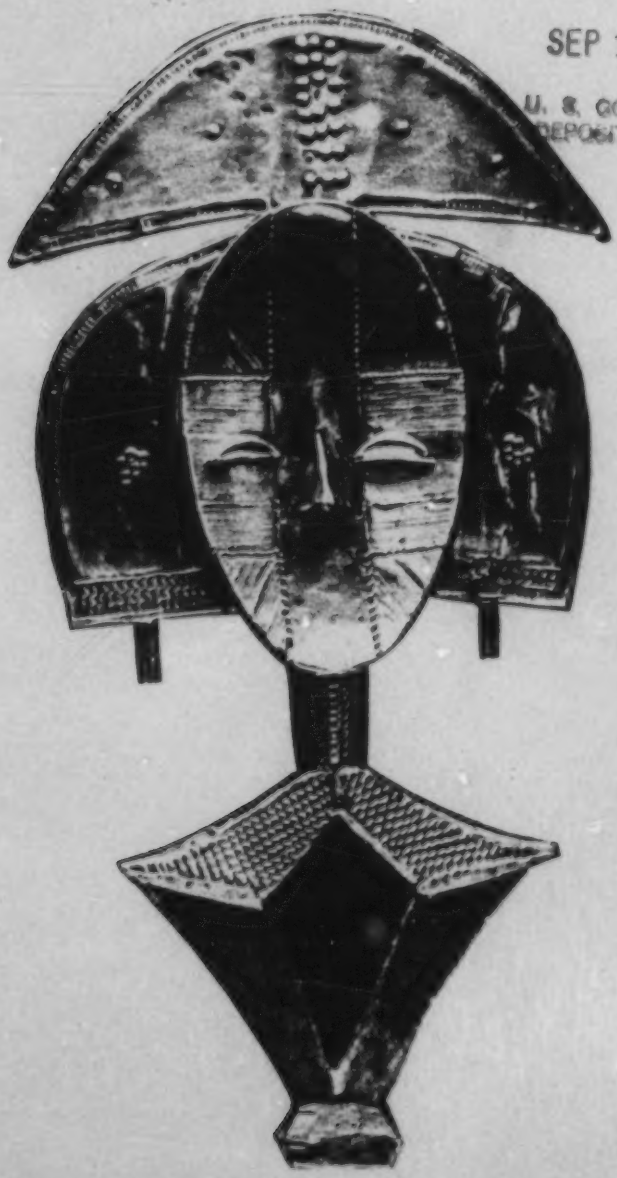

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Table of Contents

1	**The Host Country**
1	Area, Geography, and Climate
1	Population
1	Public Institutions
2	Arts, Science, and Education
2	Commerce and Industry
2	Transportation
3	Communications
4	Health and Medicine
5	Employment for Spouses and Dependents
7	**American Embassy**
7	Libreville
7	The Post and Its Administration
7	Housing
9	Food
9	Clothing
9	Supplies and Services
10	Religious Activities
10	Education
10	Recreation and Social Life
13	Official Functions
14	**Notes For Travelers**
14	Getting to the Post
14	Customs, Duties, and Passage
14	Firearms and Ammunition
14	Currency, Banking, and Weights and Measures
14	Taxes, Exchange, and Sale of Property
15	Recommended Reading
15	Local Holidays

Cover: Traditional Gabonese Bakota art of wood, brass, and copper.

Preface

The city of Libreville is on a protected bay just north of the Equator on Africa's Atlantic coast. A charming but relatively sleepy small town for many years, Libreville is undergoing a transformation into a modern city as the Gabonese economy—fueled largely by petroleum production—continues to expand.

The city's population has more than doubled since the start of the decade (to an estimated 200,000, including over 20,000 Europeans), and the colonial-style buildings which once predominated are giving way to highrise offices and apartments. The downtown core of the city is surrounded by residential districts where modern apartment buildings and houses can be found next to African huts with corrugated iron roofs. One side of the city is bounded by broad expanses of palm-lined, sandy beaches which are excellent for swimming or sunning; on the other side, new construction continues to push back the dense equatorial rain forest which covers 85% of Gabon's land area.

At a small post like Libreville, you can expect to obtain a broad, overall view of the Embassy and simultaneously focus on your own specialty. In Gabon you also learn or perfect French, the country's official language. French is spoken by almost everyone in Libreville; relatively little English is spoken. The Embassy offers a language program for all personnel.

This is the official post report prepared by the post. The information contained herein is directed to official U.S. Government employees and their families. Any other information concerning the facts as set forth herein is to be regarded as unofficial information.

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The Host Country

Area, Geography, and Climate

Gabon straddles the Equator on the west coast of Central Africa and borders on Equatorial Guinea and the Republic of Cameroon on the north and the People's Republic of the Congo (Brazzaville) on the east and south. Gabon covers about 102,300 square miles, roughly the size of Colorado and considerably larger than the U.K. or the Federal Republic of Germany.

Heavy equatorial rain forests cover nearly 85% of Gabon, with savanna areas in the southeastern and southwestern sections of the country covering an additional 10%. The remaining area is composed of swamps and water bodies, towns, villages, and roads. The Ogooue River, the largest river in West Africa between the Niger and the Congo, drains most of Gabon. Winding in a broad arc from southeastern Gabon to the country's Atlantic coast, the Ogooue cuts through three major geographical regions: the coastal lowlands, the plateau region, and the mountains.

The coastal lowlands lie along the Atlantic Ocean and extend up into the river valleys which slice through the broad interior plateau. The lowlands are lined with beaches and lagoons fringed with mangrove swamps; the forest extends from the banks of the broad, slow-moving rivers and covers most of the lowland areas. Inland, the terrain mounts to the plateau and then to the mountains, which rise as high as 5,000 feet. The land has considerable variety and the interior is often beautiful with its mountains, rolling hills, forests, and scattered grassland clearings.

The climate of Gabon is typically equatorial—hot and humid during most of the year. Temperatures range from 65° F to 77° F in the dry season, and from 86° F to 93° F in the rainy season. Four distinguishable seasons are evident although they vary somewhat each year: the long, dry season from late May until mid-September; the short, rainy season from mid-September until mid-December; the short, dry season from mid-December through January; and the long, rainy season from February until late May. Rainfall at Libreville is about 100 inches a year (the U.S. average is about 40 inches); the largest amount falls in October, November, March, April, and May. Humidity is always high, between 80% and 87%. Due to seasonal ocean currents and a high cloud cover, the long, dry season is the coolest time of the year.

Population

With an estimated 1,200,000 inhabitants, Gabon has one of the smallest populations in Africa. Its population density (an average of four persons per square mile) is also among Africa's smallest. The people are concentrated along the rivers and roads, while large areas of the interior lie empty. During the past century, an actual decline in population occurred because of disease and related factors, but increased medical care and social services have halted this trend. However, population growth is still very slow. As a consequence, economic development is hampered by a labor shortage.

The capital city of Libreville, with its estimated 200,000 inhabitants (including over 20,000 Europeans), is an attractive city which blends modern, multistory structures with traditional native quarters. The city stretches in a long, narrow belt between the seacoast and the seacoast and the forest.

Port-Gentil, with its estimated population of 60,000, is on the delta of the Ogooue River. It has long been considered the industrial capital of Gabon, since it is the center of the petroleum and plywood industries and Gabon's busiest port. Franceville, in the country's southeastern corner, is the third largest urban area in Gabon with an estimated 20,000 inhabitants.

Almost all Gabonese are members of the Bantu language group. Over 40 tribal groups have separate languages or dialects and different cultures. The largest tribe is the Fang, which comprises about one-third of the population. The other major groups are the Bapounou (22%), M'Bete (14%), Bandjabi (11%), Bakota (6%), and Myene (5%). The remainder of the population is divided among over 30 other tribes, including some 2,000 Pygmies. French, the official national language, is a unifying force.

Gabon has a relatively high percentage of Christians, although the President and several members of the government are Muslim. Official church statistics count more than 400,000 Catholics and more than 100,000 Protestants. In addition, there are a few thousand Muslims (mostly Cameroonian and other non-Gabonese Africans); the rest are animists.

Outside the major towns and cities the people are grouped in small or moderate-sized villages and live in square, wooden, or mud wattle houses surrounded by small plots of manioc and groups of banana trees. European-style dress is worn by Gabonese men and women throughout the country.

Public Institutions

Gabon is a single-party republic with a presidential form of government. The President, who is Chief of State and holds several key ministerial portfolios, is elected by universal suffrage for a 7-year term. The President appoints the Prime Minister and other members of the government. The unicameral National Assembly has 120 Deputies selected for 5-year terms.

The Parti Democratique Gabonais is the main vehicle for political and social expression. It is well organized throughout the country, with women's and youth branches at all levels.

The Constitution established an independent Supreme Court whose

judges are appointed by the President. Administratively, the country is divided into 9 Provinces headed by governors, and further subdivided into 36 prefectures. Both governors and prefects are appointed by the President.

Aside from the Chamber of Commerce (closely allied to the government and French business interests) and Rotary and Lions Clubs, few social and/or philanthropic organizations exist. Independent organizations like Scouts or Red Cross are, in effect, quasi-state organizations.

Arts, Science, and Education

Gabon's intellectual, technological, and artistic life closely follows French development, although the beginnings of a resurgence in bringing a Gabonese perspective to these areas is seen. The National University, founded in 1970, offers a license to students in faculties of letters and humanities, sciences, economics and law, and engineering. Other postsecondary institutions include the Ecole Normale Superieure, Ecole Nationale des Eaux et Forets, Ecole des Cadres Ruraux, Ecole Nationale d'Administration, Centre Universitaire des Sciences de la Santé, and Ecole Normale d'Enseignement Technique, while the Ecole Nationale d'Art et de Manufacture offers secondary school level training in various arts and crafts.

The traditional Gabonese art (mainly Fang, Bakota, and Bapounou) is among the finest in Africa, but is unfortunately unobtainable in Gabon. The Fangs and the Bakotas have for many years ceased to produce their famous reliquary figures, and almost all the old pieces have gone abroad. Some small and isolated tribes, like the Mitsoghos, still produce some ritual masks and fetishes.

Gabonese cultural traditions have been dwarfed by a decidedly European orientation on the part of the Gabonese elite. However, the first National Cultural Festival has been organized in an attempt to preserve and encourage the development of Gabonese folklore.

Commerce and Industry

Gabon has an abundance of natural resources which are helping to create a prosperous economy and a promising future for economic development. The extensive forests, which cover 85% of Gabon, were long the mainstay of the modern sector of the economy. However, the value of mineral production has exceeded that of timber and wood products, although wood products continue to play an important role in the economy and in Gabonese exports. Oil, which in 1984 accounted for 85.5% by value of Gabonese exports, has provided the principal stimulus to the country's rapid growth; manganese and uranium also constitute significant sources of export earnings. The Gabonese hope to begin production of iron ore from major (1 billion tons) high-grade deposits in the country's northeast corner.

As revenues have risen, the Gabonese Government has undertaken an extensive program of economic development. Major investments in infrastructure development include: the Transgabon Railroad, which will link Libreville to Franceville in the southeast by the end of 1987; an improved road network; new and expanded port facilities; modern airports; and schools, hospitals, and dispensaries. The Fifth Economic and Social Development Plan for the period 1984–88 provides increased emphasis on productive investments, including agriculture, and on development of infrastructure of benefit to less privileged groups.

The modern sector of the Gabonese economy is oriented toward foreign trade. The value of Gabonese exports in 1983 was $1.9 billion, while imports totaled $852 million. France remains by far Gabon's principal supplier (over 55% of Gabonese imports) and largest market (taking about 23% of Gabonese exports), while the U.S. accounts for approximately 15% of Gabon's foreign trade. The U.S. exports aircraft and earth-moving equipment to Gabon, while importing Gabonese oil and manganese ore.

As in many of the other oil-rich countries, Gabon, in the period of the oil boom, overspent and ran up large public debts, both domestic and international. The financial drain which resulted from this debt caused the government to slow down its development program. The Gabonese Government sucessfully undertook a stabilization plan which reestablished its financial balance in the early 1980s.

Transportation

Automobiles

Due to the limited availability of local public transportation, a private car is a necessity for those assigned to Libreville. Cars may be shipped from abroad on travel orders or purchased duty free from local suppliers. However, shipping costs are included in the price of cars purchased locally and are borne by the individual purchaser. Personnel planning to ship vehicles to Gabon should advise the Embassy before making final arrangements, as cars for those not on the diplomatic list must be registered as Embassy official vehicles in order to qualify for duty-free entry. Used cars are occasionally available for purchase from other diplomats, but purchases outside the diplomatic community are impractical and expensive.

Spare parts and the quality of service are erratic for all makes of vehicles. However, the best servicing facilities exist for French-made cars (Renault, Peugeot), Fiats, Toyotas, and Hondas. Thus, the shipment of foreign-made cars at government expense between posts (but not back to the U.S.) is authorized. Chrysler, Chevrolet, American Motors, and Ford are represented on the Gabonese market. However, Chrysler and Ford dealers import mostly European models and parts, and service for American-made cars is not generally available locally.

The Embassy mechanic is willing to service privately owned American cars during off-hours. If you bring an American car, include such commonly required spare parts as new tires, spark plugs, radiator hose, clutch disk, ignition points, fan belts, water pump, oil pump, and shock absorbers—all of which are unobtainable locally.

No restrictions exists on the sale of personally owned vehicles, but duty must be paid if the car is resold to a person not entitled to duty-free entry privileges. Such duties are high, and can force the price up out of reach for most buyers.

Local drivers licenses are normally issued without tests when presentation of a valid license from another country is shown. Third-party liability insurance is mandatory and must be obtained locally at a cost of $300–$400 per year. Collision insurance locally can run $700 or more, so buy it from U.S. companies if possible.

Local

The city bus service is generally not used by Embassy personnel. Taxis abound but are an unsatisfactory means of transportation. Taxi drivers pick up anyone going in their general direction; the result is often an extensive, crowded tour of the city before your destination is reached. If you find an empty taxi, it is possible to keep it for yourself by paying extra.

Regional

In addition to daily service between Libreville and Paris provided by UTA and Air Gabon, Libreville is connected directly to such other European cities as Brussels, Madrid, Geneva, Rome, Zurich, London, and Frankfurt. Service to other capitals in Central and West Africa is provided by Air Gabon and regional airlines (Air Afrique, Air Zaire, Nigerian Airways, Royal Air Maroc, Cameroon Airlines, and British Caledonian Airways), and by stops to and from Europe. Flights are available to nearby points such as Douala, Lagos, and Kinshasa.

No passenger ships call at Libreville, though some accommodations can at times be arranged on cargo vessels traveling north or south along the coast. These accommodations require advance booking and considerable flexibility in travel.

The national airline (Air Gabon) or air charter companies are the most frequent carriers for travel within Gabon; rates in either case are high. Passenger service on the first leg of the Transgabon Railroad is available on the 340 kilometers between Libreville and Booue. During the dry season, it is possible to travel in the interior by road in two-wheel-drive vehicles, but four-wheel drive is usually needed once the rains begin in earnest. Consequently, only limited possibilities exist for weekend excursions out of Libreville.

Typical beach scene in Libreville.

Communications

Telephone and Telegraph

Local and long-distance telephone service is available 24 hours daily. Long-distance telephone service is excellent but very expensive. Telegraph service is usually available to most parts of the world during normal working hours, and until noon on Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays, but it is not available at night. Charges are about $1.37 per word to the U.S. and about $1.20 per word to Europe, except France, which costs about 61¢ per word.

Mail and Pouch

Regular air and sea mail service exists between Libreville and the U.S. Transit time for international airmail to the U.S. is about 5–7 days; for pouch mail it is about 8–11 days. An international airmail letter to the U.S. costs about 60¢.

Packages, newspapers, and magazines from the U.S. can be sent to the Department's mailroom for forwarding through pouch facilities. These bulky items are airfreighted via Kinshasa, and normally arrive in 3–5 weeks. International surface mail, however, takes 3 months.

The correct mailing addresses for Embassy official personnel are as follows:

International Mail
Ambassade des Etats-Unis d'Ameri
que
B.P. 4000
Libreville, Gabon

Pouch Libreville
Department of State
Washington, D.C. 20520*

*Use ZIP code 20521 for packages or publications.

Radio and TV

Gabonese AM and FM radio stations broadcast around the clock. For VOA, BBC, and other services, a multiband radio is needed. Bring radio equipment from the U.S., as it is expensive locally.

Gabonese TV broadcasts for 1½ hours at noon and 4–5 hours each evening. Daily news programs cover local and international events, and full-length films (always in French) are shown frequently. Two color channels are in operation but no foreign pickup

USIS Cultural Center.

is provided. Most Embassy residences have TV sets. American sets are **not** compatible and should not be brought to post.

Newspapers, Magazines, and Technical Journals

L'Union a multi-page printed newspaper, is published daily with a modicum of international news. The Embassy receives both the *International Herald Tribune* and *Le Monde* (Paris) 1–5 days after publication date.

Time, Newsweek, and a few other English-language magazines are available at local book stores. Subscriptions to *Time* or *Newsweek* from Europe arrive promptly each week. Other magazine subscriptions should be sent through the Department. Local book stores are well stocked with French newspapers and periodicals. The Embassy subscribes to *Time, Newsweek,* and *The Economist.*

Health and Medicine

Medical Facilities

The Embassy shares a small Health Unit with the Peace Corps in the Marine building. A part-time contract nurse is available for about 12 hours a week. The regional Peace Corps medical doctor, as well as the Department of State regional medical officer, visits Libreville periodically (for a total of about eight visits per year).

Libreville offers fairly good medical facilities for ordinary problems (except nursing care). In addition to a large public hospital, several private clinics are staffed by expatriate (largely French) physicans. Taken together, these various facilities include among their medical personnel a number of specialists (in such areas as obstetrics/gynecology and pediatrics) as well as general practitioners, and can cope with a wide variety of routine medical problems. One local pediatrician received part of his training in the U.S. and speaks English as well as French.

Several private dentists practice in Libreville. Their work is of good quality but expensive.

Community Health

The level of community sanitation in Libreville is low compared to that in the U.S., but an effort is being made to raise standards as the city develops. Garbage, for example, is picked up six times weekly throughout the city, and there are periodic cleanup campaigns. Snakes are present in the city. Insects are an irritating problem and can never be completely eliminated; but screening and use of insecticides can keep the home relatively insect-free.

Preventive Measures

Gabon has most of the diseases common to tropical Africa: malaria, tuberculosis, leprosy, sleeping sickness, etc. You should be inoculated against yellow fever, smallpox, tetanus, typhoid, and polio prior to your arrival. Malaria suppressants should be taken 2–3 weeks before arrival, and

regularly thereafter while in Gabon. The post provides malaria suppressants for staff members. All shots can be renewed in Libreville, either by the contract nurse or regional personnel during their periodic visits.

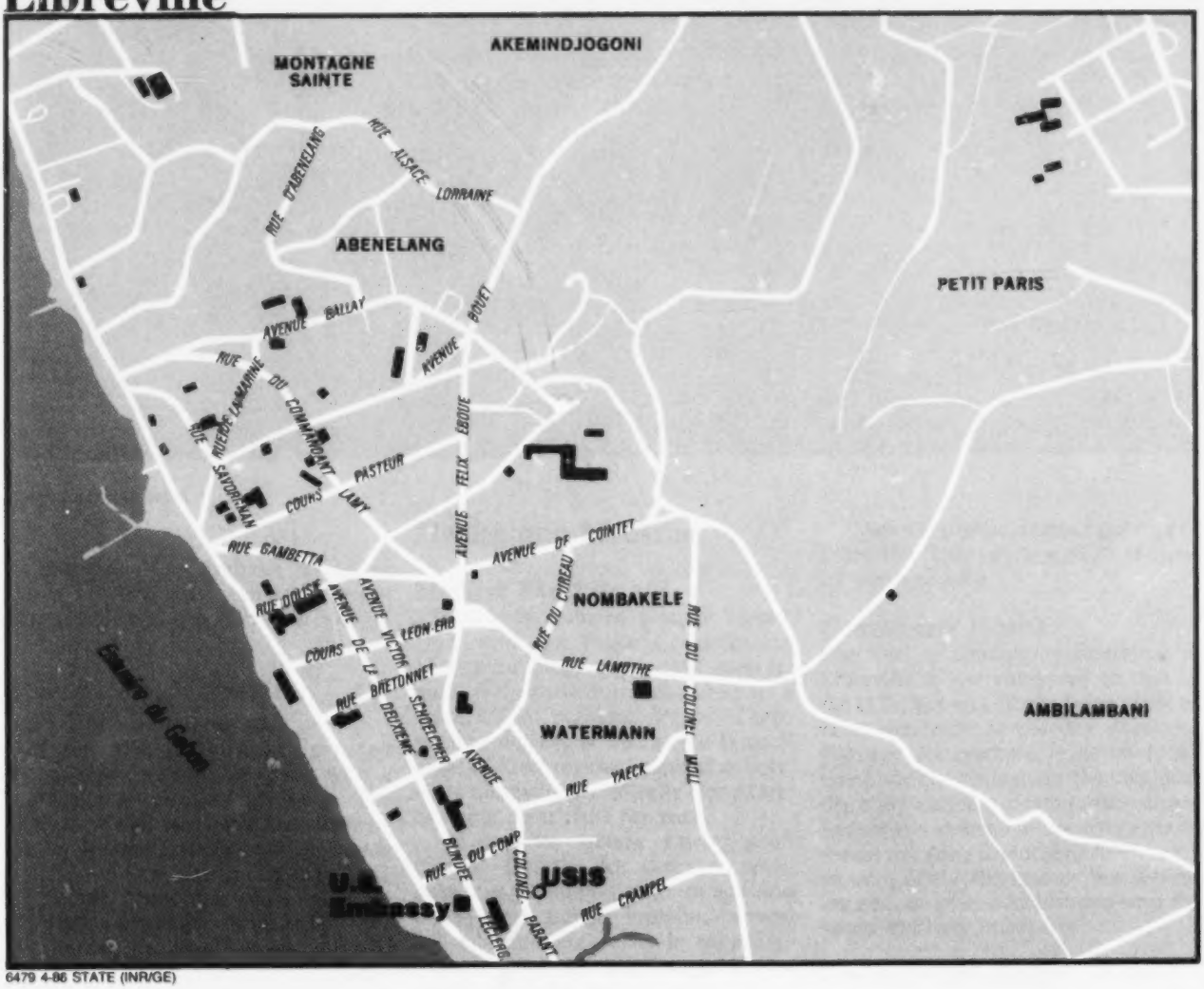
The climate itself has a tiring effect, so plenty of rest is essential. Respiratory, intestinal, or dermatological ailments are often aggravated by the hot, humid climate and lack of specialized medical attention.

Although local French technicians and other residents contend that the local water supply is safe, Americans often boil and filter their water as an additional safety precaution. Filters are provided for all personnel and, if used, should be cleaned regularly. Peel raw fruits; treat raw vegatables with an antiseptic solution.

Employment for Spouses and Dependents

Gabonese law states that a work permit is required for employment outside the Mission. However, post has found some leniency for expatriates. A work permit can be granted if there is a shortage of qualified Gabonese labor. Although jobs are available, most require fluency in French. Outside the Mission, work possibilities can be found by dependents having English-language teaching qualifications and skills such as typing, computer experience (operators and programers), and accounting or management training. Considerable personal drive is required, however, to succeed. Dependents are also hired occasionally by the Embassy for short-term projects.

Libreville



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American Embassy

Libreville

Libreville is an attractive, modern city, which has been transformed in the past few years from a sleepy town reminiscent of the colonial era, into a small metropolis. The entire city center has recently undergone a facelifting and modernization, filling the skyline with newly completed highrise office and apartment buildings. The city's four international class hotels, the Okoume Palace Inter-Continental, the Dialogue, the Dowe, and the Rapontchombo, give Libreville 2,000 first-class hotel rooms. A Sheraton hotel is under construction.

For its permanent residents, Libreville also boasts Africa's largest supermarket as well as a number of small shops and markets. Since nearly all goods are imported, usually from Europe, prices are extremely high, but almost all goods are available locally to those willing to pay the price.

The city is situated along a protected estuary with about 12 miles of attractive beaches. The high annual rainfall and ample sunshine encourage the growth of lush tropical vegetation, creating an attractive overall impression.

The Post and Its Administration

The Chancery is located in a remodeled bank overlooking the sea near the heart of the city. The Administrative Section is housed in offices next to the Chancery, and the American Cultural Center is nearby. The Center consists of a library, offices, and projection room.

The Chancery phone numbers are 72-20-03, 72-20-04, and 72-13-48. USIS can be reached on 72-15-58 and 72-21-61. All American staff residences have phones.

The post is organized along traditional Embassy lines. The Ambassador, a counselor of Embassy, a political officer, an economic/commercial officer, a consular officer, and two American secretaries make up the basic State program personnel. The Administrative Section, consisting of the administrative officer, a general services officer, two communications officers, a third-country national, and local employees, provides the normal range of adminstrative support services. USIS is a one-officer (PAO) post, with a regional administrative officer based in Libreville. There are five FSN and six contract employees. Peace Corps has been in Gabon since 1963. Over 80 volunteers work in inland fish culture, agricultural research and extension, secondary math, printing, school construction, and cooperatives. The majority of the volunteers are located in the interior of the country. New program possibilities are science teachers and wildlife management/education. Peace Corps Gabon staff includes a director and three associate directors. A six-person Marine Security Guard detachment with a noncommissioned officer in charge, protects the Embassy.

Embassy office hours are from 7:25 am to 1:00 pm and 2:30 pm to 5:30 pm, Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday, and from 7:25 am to 1:00 pm on Wednesdays.

Housing

Temporary Quarters

Personnel assigned to Libreville normally move directly into permanent quarters. If this is not possible, new arrivals are lodged in a local hotel. Notify the Embassy of your arrival date at least 2 weeks in advance so that suitable accommodations can be assured.

Permanent Housing

All Embassy and USIS personnel are assigned to furnished, government-leased or -owned quarters. The quarters are of various types and are located in different sections of the city. Apartments have pleasant living/dining rooms and 3-4 bedrooms; residences are also comfortable and have 3-4 bedrooms.

The Ambassador's residence, a U.S. Government-owned property, is an attractive, spacious, one-story house located on a hilltop. The entire property has been landscaped and fenced and entry is through a wrought iron gate. A paved driveway, ample parking space, and a two-car garage are provided. The grounds have been attractively lighted for evening entertainment.

The main house has two bedrooms, two baths, one powder room, a very large dining room, a small sitting room, and a large, sunken (nine steps), high-ceilinged reception room. A large, well-equipped kitchen completes the floor plan.

A modern, two-bedroom, two-bath guesthouse was constructed about 50 feet from the main house. The terrace connecting the two buildings is ideal for large receptions. A part of this terrace is covered, as is a similar terrace leading from the large living room.

The garden is on several levels and has been landscaped with bushes, flowers, and trees. The swimming pool, with shower and changing rooms, is situated at the lower end of the property.

The residence is completely air-conditioned and equipped with rugs and draperies throughout. Linens, silver, and crystal, as well as kitchen utensils and appliances, are supplied. A shortwave radio, stereo, TV, and VCR (Beta) are provided. The master bedroom has a queen-sized bed; all other bedrooms have two single beds.

The counselor's home (government leased) is on the beach front in one of Libreville's most attractive residential areas. It is a single-story modern house with a pleasant living/dining room, three bedrooms, two baths, kitchen, large storage area, and a terrace. The house is equipped with china, crystal,

The U.S. Embassy in Libreville.

silverware, coffee and tea service, linens, towels, pillows, and bedspreads. Basic cooking utensils, refrigerator, freezer, washer, dryer, gas stove, TV, and a VCR (Beta) are also provided.

The public affairs officer's home is government leased and is located across from a beach. It has three bedrooms, three bathrooms, a living room/dining room, and a large kitchen and pantry area. The residence has large patios and a covered carport.

Staff personnel reside in two- or three-bedroom villas in a government-owned, six-unit housing complex located on the beach. The villas are modern, two-story dwellings with living/dining room areas, a comfortable kitchen, two-and-one-half baths, laundry area, terrace, and balcony.

All residences have night guards.

The Embassy also has an attractive beach house for use by Embassy personnel. A 20-foot powerboat is available to reach the beach house.

Furnishings

Since furnished quarters are provided for all government personnel, furniture need not be brought to post, and the allowance for the shipment of household effects is limited accordingly. All quarters contain basic furniture, including lamps and draperies.

Most floors are ceramic or asphalt tile; straw or lightweight throw rugs are useful because they are cool, can be cleaned easily, and are less subject to destruction by insects. Carpets are furnished.

All bedroom and living room areas are air-conditioned, and all quarters have a freezer, refrigerator, washing machine, dryer, and gas stove. Bring linens, plenty of dishes and glassware, pots and pans, cutlery, ice trays, and kitchen utensils, as well as musical and sports equipment, books, art objects, pictures, etc.

The air-conditioning helps to protect most objects from the humidity and mildew. However, frequent cleaning and vacuuming is necessary. Household effects are generally transported in liftvans or, wherever possible, containers. Liftvans, in particular, should be waterproofed as thoroughly as possible to avoid possible moisture or water damage, especially during the rainy season.

Utilities and Equipment

All government quarters have hot and cold running water in kitchens and bathrooms. All quarters have adequate bathroom facilities. Heating facilities are neither available nor necessary. Bottled butane gas is supplied for all stoves.

Electricity has now been standardized at 220/230v (wye system), so that 110v current can be obtained only with the use of transformers. You can bring 220v kitchen appliances, although transformers are provided by the Embassy for 110v equipment.

Tape recorders, record players, and any other electrical products should be adjusted to 50 cycles before coming to post. In addition, bring voltage regulators to protect stereo equipment, since local prices are exhorbitant.

Bring a good supply of adapter plugs for electrical appliances and lamps. It is not possible to adapt imported TV sets to the local system. TV sets for Gabonese programing are available locally.

Food

Most food in Libreville is imported from Europe or from other parts of Africa, and is therefore expensive. Imported fresh fruits and vegetables are available, although selection is limited and quality is sometimes poor. The selection of meat is usually good. Beef prices are comparable to those in the U.S., but other meats are considerably more expensive. Dairy products, including processed whole milk imported from Europe, are generally available at all times. Baby food is available locally, but prices are high and selection can be poor.

Orders for juices, tonic, and alcoholic beverages are placed every quarter with a local distributor, and delivery is generally made within 4 weeks. Newly assigned personnel should take advantage of the 2,000-pound consumables allowance that enables them to ship to post an initial supply of goods.

Freezers are provided for all employees, and are commonly used for storing flour and other staples as well as for frozen goods. Airtight plastic food containers are highly recommended to protect foodstuffs against insect spoilage.

Clothing

Lightweight clothing is worn year round, but bring a few sweaters for the evenings during the dry seasons.

Clothing sold locally is of mediocre quality and extremely expensive. Therefore, bring enough clothing and footwear for an entire tour.

The Embassy maintains a file of catalogs from mail-order houses and stores in the U.S.; clothing can be obtained through them.

Bring a sewing machine, notions, fabrics, and patterns. Several stores sell fabric and notions in Libreville. Although prices are high, homemade clothing affords a considerable savings over local ready-made items. Dress patterns available in Libreville are all French, and differ from American patterns in design and format (e.g., no seam allowances are on the patterns). A few Gabonese and West African tailors make interesting shifts and shirts from African cloth, including some with beautiful machine-made embroidery, at high prices; shirts are suitable for casual wear for men, while dresses are often appropriate for more formal evening occasions. As some of these tailors specialize in embroidery, it is also possible to sew your own dresses or shirts and then have them decorated with embroidery by the tailor.

Men. Officers need at least five or six summerweight suits, including one or two dark suits for government functions and official dinners. Washable suits and slacks are preferable, since drycleaning facilities are limited and expensive. Formal wear is required for the annual Marine Ball and may be needed occasionally by the Ambassador and DCM for official functions; local practice calls for a tuxedo with black jacket, not white. Much entertaining is informal, however, with slacks and sport shirts the standard dress.

Bring an ample supply of dress and sport shirts, underwear, shoes, sandals, and socks. Colorful shirts in African cloth are locally available at reasonable prices. Hats are not worn except occasionally as protection from the sun, especially at the beach. Bring a good supply of bathing suits, rubber thongs, and beach towels. Shorts and T-shirts are commonly worn for sports activities; whites and tennis shoes are standard for tennis players.

Women. Dresses and pants of lightweight fabrics are worn year round, both at the office and for social occasions. Fabrics that will hold up well under constant laundering are strongly recommended. Formal wear is required for the annual Marine Ball and may be needed occasionally by the Ambassador and DCM. Although short dresses can be worn for informal and casual evenings, in practice, long dresses, long skirts, caftans, and pants tend to be more popular. Pants, loosefitting dresses and shifts, as well as skirts and blouses, are worn daily. Whatever your preference, bring a large supply.

Shoe sizes and quality are limited and prices are extremly high. Women should bring enough shoes, sandals, and tennis shoes to last a tour. Sandals with high heels and comfortable pumps are worn at parties. Hats, gloves, and hose are never needed. Peds should be brought to post if required, as they are unavailable here.

Three or four swimsuits, beach towels, jackets, sun hats, and thongs are desirable. Shorts, tennis dresses, T-shirts, and bermudas are worn for athletics. Bring a large supply of underwear, because the frequent laundering tends to disintegrate the elastic.

Lightweight raincoats are useful during the heavy rains, but some find them unbearable in the heat and humidity, and prefer umbrellas. Tennis shoes and thongs are often substituted for boots for the same reason.

Children. Bring lots of washable, sturdy clothing, as well as a large supply of socks and footwear. Orthopedic shoes should be brought if needed, as they are not found here.

Supplies and Services

Supplies

Bring an initial supply of cigarettes, toiletries, cosmetics, toilet tissues, facial tissues, soap, toothpaste, razor blades, shaving cream, deodorant, shampoo, and medicines, as they are expensive in Libreville. Basic medicines, including malaria suppressants, are available at the Embassy. Although supplies can be ordered, orders from the U.S. or Denmark take about 2 months to arrive and some items, such as hypoallergenic cosmetics, are not carried. Bring a good supply of sunglasses, as those sold locally are expensive. Prescription glasses and sunglasses are usually not available. Leave a prescription record with a reputable optician in the U.S. should it become necessary to order another pair.

Irons and ironing boards are essential, and extra ironing board covers are useful. Mops, except sponge mops, and brooms are sold locally, but the quality is poor. Other items needed include: wooden or plastic coat hangers, adaptor plugs, can openers, mothballs, mildew ban packets, and any sure roach killers. Plastic bags and hanging plastic clothes protectors are useful. Both a sewing kit, including safety pins, and any do-it-yourself tool

kits are valuable, as repair items and skilled workers are hard to find on short notice.

Home entertaining is a major source of diversion in Libreville. Bring an ample supply of cocktail napkins, ashtrays, hors d'oeuvre trays, and other supplies that add a personal touch to a party. A large stock of china, glassware, and flatware is helpful.

Thermos jugs are essential for beach excursions and out-of-town journeys.

Stereos, tape recorders, shortwave radios, musical instruments, games, and as many books as possible will help compensate for the dearth of cultural facilities.

Gift wrapping, stationery, children's party supplies, Christmas tree ornaments, and the like are exorbitantly priced and should be brought. Table candles are available through mail-order catalogs, but an initial supply should be sent with household effects.

In general, any equipment, appliances, or utensils that are important to your morale should be brought, because quality here is variable and prices are excessively high by U.S. standards. An ice chest comes in handy for picnics to the Embassy beach house.

Basic Services

The few tailors and dressmakers in Libreville are relatively expensive for any but the simplest patterns, and care must be taken to find those who are skilled. Several small shops repair shoes, but the quality is highly uneven. Laundry is normally done at home (washing machines are available to all personnel), and there are satisfactory (though expensive) drycleaning facilities in Libreville. Several good beauty shops in town charge $30 to $60 for a shampoo and set, while barbers charge from $12 to $15 for a man's haircut. Household, auto, and radio repairs are available, but generally only for internationally known brands, and the service is undependable. Libreville has a camera and photoshop, but prices are high. Spare parts for American cars and appliances are unavailable.

Domestic Help

Although household help is desirable, well-trained domestics are difficult to find. Most are at best moderately skilled and expensive in comparison with services rendered. Well-trained cooks are also hard to find. Except for the Ambassador's residence, servants do not live in. A minimum wage law is in effect for domestic help. Servants should have a medical checkup regularly, as there is a wide incidence of disease.

Local law requires that insurance be carried on domestics. Medical treatment is provided by the Gabonese Government through the social security program, as is a basic list of medications.

Religious Activities

Several Roman Catholic churches, and two Protestant churches of the Eglise Evangelique du Gabon, akin to the French Protestant church or the Presbyterian church in the U.S., are in the city. One of these Protestant churches was built by American missionaries in 1848. All church services are in French.

Education

Dependent Education

At Post. Several public and parochial schools in Libreville give instruction in French through the equivalent of high school. The curriculum is satisfactory and includes athletics; but teaching standards—especially at the high school level—are, in some instances, low and classrooms tend to be seriously overcrowded.

The school year in the French schools runs from the end of September until mid-June, with vacations of 2 weeks at Christmas/New Year, 1 week in late February, and 2 weeks at Easter. Students can leave the first week of June without loss of credit after having completed their year-end examinations. Allowances based on the rate for the American International School (below) are ample to cover all charges in other local schools, as well as supplementary tutoring if required.

The American International School was opened in February 1976. The school offers a full curriculum from kindergarten through grade 8. It is staffed by four full-time trained teachers and three part-time fully trained French, mathematics, and science teachers. The 54 students enrolled for 1985–86 academic year come from England, Canada, Nigeria, Liberia, Ivory Coast, France, Switzerland, Gabon, Italy, Somalia, Poland, Netherlands, Korea, Belgium, India, and the U.S. Tuition fees for Embassy personnel are fully covered by the State Department allowance.

Away From Post. The Department's away-from-post education allowance is based on the cost of attending secondary school in the U.S., and is currently $13,450 a year per child. American schools in Yaounde (primary) and Kinshasa (primary and secondary) offer limited boarding facilities for those who might prefer a location closer than the U.S.

Further information on schooling can be obtained by writing directly to the administrative officer.

Post Orientation Program

Due to the small size of the post, introductions and orientation are provided informally to all personnel shortly after arrival; no set program of briefings is given.

Knowledge of French is essential in Libreville. The post maintains a language-training program for staff members and their dependents. Instruction books and FSI training tapes are available for Units 1–24 of the FSI French course.

Recreation and Social Life

Sports

Sports and outdoor life are the main diversions in Libreville. Swimming, fishing, tennis, golf, and sunbathing on the beach are all popular. There is one expensive horseback riding facility.

Water Sports. The ocean provides the city's main recreation. At the edge of town are long palm-lined beaches, and swimming and sunbathing are possible year round. Fishing or water skiing enthusiasts may send a motorboat to Libreville or buy a used boat after arrival. The deeper waters offshore abound in many types of game

Above: Ambassador's residence. Below: Staff villas.

fish, tarpon, barracuda, sailfish, marlin, sea bass, and occasional sharks. Protected waters nearer the coast allow for skindiving although waters are often murky. Skindiving gear is available locally at relatively high cost. Sailing and windsurfing are very popular.

Tennis, Golf, and Other Sports. The largest of Libreville's sports clubs is the Mindoube Club, which offers tennis, riding, swimming, and a small bar and restaurant for its members. The club has five night-lighted tennis courts and stables where horses may be boarded or rented. Membership can be arranged for Embassy personnel, but costs are high. An initiation fee is charged, and dues thereafter are calculated separately for the club (with use of pool) and for the tennis and riding sections. The basic club dues, for example, for a family are $127 inscription fees, tennis $16 a month (children under 15 no fees), horseback riding $21 per month and $9 an hour (mounting). Tennis lessons are available from the resident professional. A tennis net has been installed on the parking lot at the Ambassador's residence which converts to a fairly good practice court, but the irregular surface precludes serious competition.

The Golf Club de l'Estuaire offers a challenging 18-hole course for golf buffs. The fairways and sand greens are moderately well maintained, but the rough is very dense during the rainy season. As a result, balls are often lost. Bring a large supply, as extra balls are sometimes hard to find locally and are always expensive. The club has relatively few members, so the course is never crowded. An entrance fee is charged, and annual dues are $650 single or $1,000 for a family.

Several other sports and hobbies are represented by clubs in Libreville. An aeroclub offers flying instruction and the opportunity for licensed pilots to use flight aircraft owned by the club at rates well below those charged by charter operators. A para club attracts parachutists, and there are also judo, karate, and jujitsu clubs.

Hunting. Governmental controls on firearms and hunting privileges have made sport hunting increasingly difficult to the point where outings might be arranged only through personal intercession with a few expatriates or Gabonese who still have personal access to preserves.

Touring and Outdoor Activities

The internationally known hospital founded by Dr. Albert Schweitzer, 160 miles from Libreville at the town of Lambarene, offers a pleasant weekend excursion from the capital. It can be reached by air or, during the dry seasons, by a 4–5 hour drive through forested landscape.

With suitable advance notice, adequate accommodations (including meals) can be obtained in Lambarene at Sofitel Ogooue Palace. The hospital staff offers a warm welcome to visitors and provides guided tours of the facilities, which include both old and new hospital buildings, and a small museum devoted to Dr. Schweitzer's life and work. A trip by motorized pirogue (dugout canoe) on the Ogooue River and into a series of adjacent lakes can also be arranged. Such a trip, which can last from 1 hour to an entire day, offers an opportunity to see hippopotami, crocodiles, monkeys, and colorful birds.

All parts of Gabon can be reached by air, but plane fares are expensive. Travel by road requires four-wheel-drive vehicles during the rainy seasons, but can be accomplished during the dry seasons in two-wheel-drive cars with heavy-duty springs suitable for rough roads. Passenger train service is available between Libreville and Booue.

Most provincial capitals have adequate hotel facilities, and several private companies in the interior will offer hospitality to visitors with sufficient prior notice. This increased availability of accommodations, combined with an active program of road construction, is making travel by car in the interior more practicable than before, but such trips will continue to require a pioneering spirit for several years to come. For those willing to make the effort, however, the country is attractive and varied. Highlights include extensive mining operations in the southeast; open savanna country in the southwest (with herds of buffalo and an occasional elephant); forested, inaccessible mountain ranges stretching across the central part of the country; agricultural areas in the north; and miles and miles of unbroken forest nearly everywhere in Gabon.

Entertainment

Entertainment outside the home is limited, though possibilities have increased as the city has grown. A number of good (but usually expensive) restaurants offer Gabonese, French, Italian, Vietnamese, and north African specialties. Several nightclubs (again expensive) have dancing to recorded and live music.

Movies are available both at the Komo cinema and Bowlingstore (comparable to a first-run theater in the U.S.) and through the Army and Air Force Motion Picture Service (AAFMPS), West African Circuit. All films at the Komo and Bowlingstore are in French; films of U.S. or British origin are dubbed. AAFMPS films are available for individual or group viewing, as well as American classic films on an irregular basis. There are frequent film showings at the French Cultural Center.

Live theater or musical entertainment is only occasionally found in Libreville. Special shows or visiting entertainers appear occasionally at the Komo or at one of the hotels, and the French Cultural Center offers a few lectures and theatrical presentations.

The USIS Cultural Center has a small library which has books and records available for loan. Shortwave radio reception from Europe and Africa is satisfactory. Bring cameras and film; local prices for such equipment are exorbitant.

Social Activities

Among Americans. The American community consists of Embassy personnel, Peace Corps Volunteers, missionaries, business people, and their families. They tend to get together for informal picnics, dinners, and cocktails. Volleyball games and softball games are organized occasionally.

The American Business Association is composed of Embassy officers and people involved with American commercial enterprises in Gabon. It holds a monthly luncheon.

International Contacts. More than 35 Ambassadors reside here, and the number of diplomatic missions is increasing. The Corps meets at numerous receptions as well as informally at dinners, luncheons, etc. Social interaction with the expatriate business and pro-

U.S. Marine House.

fessional community, and with Gabonese Government officials and private individuals, is part of the life of the international community.

Official Functions

Nature of Functions

Entertaining in Libreville follows no formula, and you are free to entertain in the manner which is most comfortable and convenient. Outdoor barbecues, buffets, cocktails, and five-course, sitdown dinners, have all been used with success by personnel currently at this post.

Most Gabonese Government occasions require dark suits for men. Women wear dressy cottons during the day, and long skirts and dresses at night.

The Ambassador presents credentials in a dark suit (tenue sombre) or appropriate dress. Morning dress or white tie has not been used in recent years. As noted previously, the Ambassador and DCM should bring a tuxedo (black jacket) or a long formal dress for occasional official functions as well as for the Marine Ball.

Standards of Social Conduct

Following presentation of credentials, the Ambassador should call on diplomatic colleagues and on various members of the Gabonese Government. Other officers call on their counterparts within the diplomatic corps and on working contacts in the government and private sector. Calling cards are normally left on such occasions, and are also used as a transmittal when sending printed materials to official contacts. Three hundred calling cards should suffice for the Ambassador, and 200 for other officers. Staff members are not required to have calling cards, but may find them useful.

Most introductions in this small community take place in the course of social events. New arrivals will usually meet other members of the Mission, including the Ambassador and spouse, in these types of informal settings.

Printed invitations and cards can be ordered locally, and white embossed seal cards are stocked at the Embassy for use with local printers. Engraving services are not locally available, however, so engraved invitations and cards should be obtained before arrival. Several Ambassadors have used engraved invitations (in French) on gold-seal cards for formal dinners, and locally printed invitations on white-seal cards for large receptions, and have found this combination to be both practical and relatively economical.

Official informals are useful for everyone at the Embassy, as most invitations are extended by telephone and then followed up by a written reminder. Prepackaged, colorful invitations are also quite useful for informal occasions.

Notes For Travelers

Getting to the Post

Include wash-and-wear and summer clothing in both accompanying baggage and unaccompanied airfreight. A limited shipment of everyday china, pots, pans, silverware, etc., should be sent via unaccompanied airfreight, as seafreight usually takes several months from the U.S., 1–2 months from Europe, and correspondingly longer from other areas. Airfreight transit times are erratic, ranging from several days to 1 month from the U.S., and averaging about a week from European points of origin.

Customs, Duties, and Passage

At present no customs or duties are charged U.S. Government personnel. This free-entry privileges applies to all items imported for personal use throughout the tour of duty. To help retain this privilege, all orders for food and beverages are made through the Administrative Section, which, upon approval, places them periodically on a group basis.

Visas are required for all Americans entering Gabon; persons arriving without visas are delayed while special permission for entry is requested. Visas are obtained from the Gabonese Embasssy in Washington, D.C., from the Gabonese Mission to the U.N. in New York, or from a French Embassy or Consulate in any part of the world where Gabon has no representation. U.S. Government personnel turn their passports over to the Embassy Consular Section upon arrival in Gabon, and multiple-entry visas are requested for the intended length of their assignment.

All persons entering Gabon are required to have a valid smallpox vaccination and yellow fever shots.

Pets

Health regulations for animals are not enforced and no quarantine is imposed. However, be prepared to present a Certificate of Health from a veterinarian stating that your animal is in good health and indicating that it has been inoculated against rabies or has been in a rabies-free area for the previous 6 months. Gabon itself is not a rabies-free area.

Firearms and Ammunition

Gabonese law only permits the entry of rifles, shotguns (nonautomatic), and 100 rounds of ammunition. Pistols are not permitted. However, prior approval to bring weapons into Gabon is required. Send well in advance the make, caliber, and serial number to the Embassy for referral to the Ministry of Water and Forests for registration. After the weapons arrive, they are inspected and registered by the Gabonese Government.

Currency, Banking, and Weights and Measures

Gabon is a member of the franc zone. It forms a monetary union with the other members of the UDEAC (Congo-Brazzaville, Central African Republic, Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, Chad). These countries have a common currency, the Communaute Financiere Africaine (CFA) franc, issued by their common central bank, the Banque Centrale des Etats de l'Afrique Equatoriale et du Cameroun.

The CFA franc is fully convertible at the official rate, which fluctuates daily in relation to the dollar. The exchange rate varied during 1984/85 from CFA 500 to CFA 400 per dollar. Six commercial banks with international affiliations maintain offices in Gabon: the Banque Internationale pour le Gabon (BIPG), a subsidiary of the Banque Internationale pour l'Afrique Occidentale (BIAO); the Union Gabonaise de Banque (UGB), on which Morgan Guaranty holds a 15% interest; the Banque de Paris et des Pays-Bas Gabon (Paribas); the Banque Internationale pour le Commerce et l'Industrie du Gabon (BICIG), in which Bank of America has a minority interest; the Banque du Gabon et du Luxembourg (BGL); the Bank of Credit and Commerce International (BCCI); and Citibank. The first four of these banks offer regular commercial services.

Gabon uses the metric system of weights and measures.

Taxes, Exchange, and Sale of Property

Restrictions

There is no limit on the amount of foreign exchange that can be brought into or subsequently carried out of Gabon. Dollar travelers checks are accepted at hotels, but for all other purchases, the local CFA franc is used.

Mission personnel do not pay income or other direct taxes in Gabon.

Facilities

The only legal tender in Gabon is the CFA franc, although French francs are accepted by some business firms. The French Government guarantees convertibility of the CFA franc. The Embassy Class-B cashier cashes personal dollar checks of U.S. Government personnel for CFA francs at the official USG/RFC rate.

Checking accounts are easily established at several local banks. A service charge is added annually, but thereafter dollar checks can be changed for CFA francs to be deposited in the account at no cost.

All personnel are urged to maintain a dollar checking account in the U.S. to facilitate the paying of bills outside Gabon.

Recommended Reading

These titles are provided as a general indication of the material currently available on this country. The Department of State does not endorse unofficial publications.

Few books in print have been written specifically about Gabon, and only two full-length works in English. Though both of the latter are over 15 years old, they are still worth reading. These are: *Africa Betrayal* by former U.S. Ambassador Charles Darlington and his wife (McKay Publishing Company: New York, 1967), and *Gabon: Nation-Building on the Ogooue* by Brian Weinstein (MIT Press: Cambridge, 1967). The book by the Darlingtons is a highly personal narrative of their experiences during their tour in Gabon (1961–64), while the Weinstein study offers a comprehensive academician's account of Gabonese political history and structures.

The life of Dr. Albert Schweitzer at Lambarene is detailed in two of his works—*On the Edge of the Primeval Forest*, based on letters during his first stay (1913–17), and *More From the Primeval Forest*, based on the second period at Lambarene (1924–27). His biographer, George Seaver, in *Albert Schweitzer—The Man and His Mind*, also covers in some detail the work of Dr. Schweitzer at his hospital at Lambarene.

Beyond these, two older works in English offer good chapters on Gabon in what are essentially survey volumes. These are *National Unity and Regionalism in Eight African States* edited by Gwendolyn Carter (Cornell University Press: 1966) and *The Emerging States of French Equatorial Africa* by Virginia Thompson and Richard Adloff (Stanford University Press: 1960).

Additional material is available in French, including a 1970 volume by Jacques Bouquerel titled simply *Le Gabon* (Presses Universitaires de France, Paris). A few pamphlets on Gabon are also published by the French Government and by the Gabonese Ministry of Tourism; copies are available in Washington from the French and Gabonese Embassies, respectively. A recent book, *French on Gabon, Les Affaires Africaines*, is banned in Gabon.

Local Holidays

Currently 10 Gabonese legal holidays are celebrated, some of which coincide with American holidays. Of these, the most important are Renovation Day (March 12), which commemorates the founding of Gabon's single political party, and the 3-day independence celebrations (August 16–18), which mark the end of colonial rule on August 17, 1960. Other Gabonese holidays include: Christmas and New Year's Day, Easter Monday, the last day of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, Labor Day (May 1), Pentecost (in June), and All Saint's Day (in November).